A RARE IMAGE OF BHAIRAVA FROM BARAKAR

By

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Sometime in 1964, a very interesting piece of sculpture[1] (Museum No. 11212; 136 cm. × 63 cm.) was found from the bed of the river Barakar, situated at a distance of about 30 miles from Dhanbad (Bihar). The image was spotted in the course of the erosion caused by the river. Presently, the image is housed in the Museum at Patna.

Within a miniature temple of Orissan style, the sculpture presents a four-armed male figure standing in the ālidha attitude. The āmalaka of the temple is flanked by two flying gandharvas, who appear to be carrying garlands in their hands. The male figure is wearing a cupola-like head-dress with which two creeper-like objects are attached. He is also wearing two pendants in his ears. He has somewhat bulging eyes looking down wards, prominent nose, bushy eyebrows, wide mouth, and prominent moustaches. His all the four hands are adorned with armlets and bangles, and holds a sword and an arrow in the left and a bow and a long trident in the right arms respectively. His body displays a number of ornaments including necklaces of three different sizes. The long garments of the figure resembles very much with the Burmese *Loongi* which comes up a little above the knees with a decorated flap. A long ribbon is tied just below his naval portion (Udarabandha), the knot of which can clearly be seen. The principal figure is attended upon by two male persons whose miniature figures are shown standing on his either side. The two attendant figures resemble greatly with the main figure with the only difference that whereas the main figure is endowed with four arms the former have each only two arms. The attendant standing to his right is holding a sword and a long trident, while the other to his left is holding a sword and a shield.

The figure in question has posed a problem to the scholars with regard to its identification. In spite of best efforts made by iconographists, no satisfactory identification of the figure has been suggested so far. It may, however, be pointed out that the Viṣṇudharmottara furnishes

1. See the Plate no. II. For the photograph, I am greatly obliged to the Curator of the Patna Museum.



Image of Bhairava from Barakar (14th century A. D.)

a detailed description of Bhairava, one of the important terrific aspects of Lord Śiva. According to the work "Bhairava should have a flabby belly, round yellow eyes, side tusks and wide most rils and should be wearing a garlands of skulls. He should be also adorned with snakes as ornaments. The complexion of Bhairava is dark as the rain-cloud and his garment the elephant's skin, he should have several arms carrying several weapons. He should be represented as frightening Pārvatī with a snake"[2].

It may, however, be observed that the Barakar sculpture described above does not tally in all the features with the iconographic description embodied in the Viṣṇudharmottara quoted above. But there can hardly be any doubt as to the Śaivite nature of the deity which is fully established by the presence of the trident held in his front left hand. It is though evident that the principal figure does not depict the features of the textual description, yet the fact can not be lost sight of that he is rendered hideous in his appearance, which is one of the important features of Bhairava. The presence of the trident in the hand of the deity along with his terrific look makes it probable that the deity is no other than Bhairava himself. There is of course no representation of the dog on the pedestal and the garland of skulls is also conspicuous by its absence. Moreover, the presence of the bow and the arrow in the hands of the principal figure is also highly enigmatical. Any way the attendants on his either side are also of Śaivite character, as is conformed by one of the attendants also holding a trident. Taking all the facts together, it may once more be stressed that the figure in question represents Bhairava with two of his attendants.

The sculpture is made out of slate stone in the form of a stela, and, on stylistic ground, it can be assigned to the 14th century A. D.

2. Gopinath Roy, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, Vol. II, Part I, p. 177.